



# HUMAN RIGHTS AT HOME

## U.S. Helsinki Commission Leadership on Domestic Compliance with OSCE Commitments

The Helsinki Final Act emphasizes the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms as one of the fundamental obligations of government and reaffirms that recognition of these rights and freedoms constitutes the foundation of justice and peace.

Since its inception, the Helsinki Commission has recognized human rights challenges in the United States as well as abroad and endeavored to find solutions to those problems.

1979 – 2020

Chairman Dante Fascell and Co-Chairman Claiborne Pell hold a series of **hearings** to examine the United States' record on implementing and abiding by its commitments under the Helsinki Final Act.

Following President Carter's commitment for the U.S. to embody the principles outlined in the Helsinki Final Act, Chairman Fascell convenes a **briefing** where representatives from U.S. government agencies, including the Department of State and the Department of Justice, and civil society organizations testified about problems with the existing visa regime and possible changes to align U.S. law with the freedom of movement provisions in the Helsinki Accords.

The Helsinki Commission issues a comprehensive staff **report** assessing the U.S. implementation record on the Helsinki Final Act in light of criticism from other CSCE countries. The report is designed to stimulate honest implementation evaluations by other states, and to improve compliance by the United States.

The Helsinki Commission staff **reports** on the legal status of religious groups in the United States, including issues related to freedom of religion, the Establishment Clause, the Free Exercise Clause, religious free speech, freedom of association, and federal tax exempt status.

Chairman Alcee L. Hastings holds a **hearing** to discuss the international perspective of the detention facility at the U.S. Naval Bases at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, especially how the OSCE states view it, and implications for U.S. leadership on human rights issues.

Chairman Hastings convenes a **field hearing** to examine what constitutes torture, what legal norms apply, what is known about the effectiveness of various interrogation methods, and whether interrogation techniques of suspected terrorists by the U.S. government qualified as torture.

Black and minority elected officials from the United States and Europe meet in Brussels to discuss minority political involvement – both barriers and strategies for advancing it – and the role of minorities in policymaking. The **transatlantic dialogue** on race and diversity begins a **decade** of initiatives by Members of Congress at the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly.

1979

1986

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2002

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2009

2020

The Helsinki Commission convenes a **hearing** to examine if provisions of the 1952 McCarran-Walter Act are consistent with the U.S. commitment under the Helsinki Final Act to facilitate freer movement and contacts.

The Helsinki Commission staff **reports** on the issue of homelessness in America, including its origins and dimensions, and government and nongovernmental organizations' responses to the growing problem.

Following the 1992 Helsinki Summit, which expanded previously limited references to migrant workers and mandated the newly established OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights to convene a seminar on migrant workers, the Helsinki Commission organizes five days of public **briefings** examining the plight of migrant workers, including demographics and living conditions, health and safety concerns, and children's issues.

Chairman Ben Nighthorse Campbell introduces **S.Con.Res. 124**, a resolution condemning the use of torture and other forms of cruel, inhumane, or degrading treatment or punishment in the United States and other countries and expressing support for victims of those practices.

Chairman Hastings holds a **field hearing** with Los Angeles community leaders to discuss the challenges, positive aspects, and best practices relating to migration.

Following the Supreme Court decision in *Boumediene v. Bush*, which held that foreign terrorism suspects held at the Guantanamo Bay detention facility have the right to challenge their detention in a U.S. civilian court, Chairman Hastings convenes a **hearing** to review additional detainee-related policy issues to learn from European experience with terror suspects.

Chairman Hastings holds a **briefing** with Physicians for Human Rights (PHR) on the medical evidence of torture by U.S. personnel in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Guantanamo Bay and the impact on detainees.

The Helsinki Commission launches "Human Rights at Home" hearing series focused on **racial justice**, **press freedom**, and **restorative justice** in the United States.